

# VP-4 holds change of command in Diego Garcia

**Lt. Richard Pool**  
*VP-4 Public Affairs Officer*

With few variations, patrol squadron change of command ceremonies are often identical to every other in the fleet. Whether held on the fantail of a destroyer, the hangar deck of an aircraft carrier or in the hangar of an aviation unit, the heart of the ceremony is the formal reading of official orders.

Command passes upon the salute and utterance by the relieving officer, "I relieve you, sir." The officer being relieved returns the salute and responds, "I stand relieved." This simple ceremony reflects the dedication of free men and women serving their nation proudly.

Patrol Squadron Four (VP 4) held its change of command ceremony on April 8 in Diego Garcia as distinguished guests and squadron members looked on. Cmdr. Tyrone Payton became the 53rd commanding officer of the squadron to speak those words and to take command of the "Skinny Dragons."

The ceremony marked the end of Cmdr. M. Douglass Yancey's command tour, and ushered in new executive officer, Cmdr. Robert "Rocky" Racoosin.

Capt. Harry B. Harris, Comman-

der Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing One, Commander Task Force Fifty Seven and Commander Task Force Seventy Two opened the ceremony praising the 'Dragons' for their efforts in the war on terror.

"We are a nation at war and you are leading the way," stated Harris. He then introduced the guest speaker, Rear Adm. Anthony Winns, Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Force U.S. Pacific Fleet.

"I'm extremely proud of the performance of the Skinny Dragons. You are on the tip of the spear and have exceeded all expectations," said Winns, praising the accomplishments of the squadron under the command of Yancey.

He also thanked Yancey for his outstanding service as commanding officer and challenged the new commanding officer to continue the tradition of excellence.

Yancey thanked the people involved in making the ceremony a special one. He also thanked his family for their untiring support during his command tour and his entire career.

He closed his comments by challenging the command to continue their efforts in the war on terror, and once again expressed his pride

as "Dragon One."

Following his remarks, Yancey read his orders followed by Payton who saluted Yancey and stated, "I relieve you Sir".

Yancey leaves the Skinny Dragons after a year of unrivaled accomplishments. The squadron has been an integral part of Operation Enduring Freedom and Southern Watch flying numerous combat and reconnaissance missions while re-defining the war-fighting role of the P-3 Orion aircraft.

As Payton took the helm as commanding officer, he challenged the squadron saying, "In the upcoming year, I challenge all Skinny Dragons to settle for nothing short of excellence. To achieve this, I truly believe we must invest in our most precious commodity, our people."

A member of VP-4 since March of last year, Payton is a native of Shreveport, La., who graduated with a bachelor of science degree from Louisiana Tech University in 1982 and was commissioned an ensign through the Naval Aviation Officer Candidate School in 1983. He completed Naval Flight Training at Corpus Christi, Texas, and earned his "Wings of Gold" in 1984.

A traditional cake cutting followed the ceremony and a reception



PH3 Looney photo  
(L to R) Rear Adm. Anthony Winns, COMPATRECONFORPAC; Cmdr. Tyrone Payton, VP-4 CO; and just relieved Cmdr. M. Douglass Yancey slice the cake after the change of command ceremony.

at the Diego Garcia Officer's Club, where officers and chief petty officers celebrated the event and reflected over the past year while looking toward the future.

The new executive officer, Cmdr. "Rocky" Racoosin, will take over where Payton left off. Born in El Pa-

so, Texas and raised in Alamogordo, N. M., Racoosin graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1985 and was designated a naval flight officer in September 1986. He served at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center prior to joining the Skinny Dragon team.

# USS Salvor Sailors give Big Island wetlands a facelift



Sailors from USS Salvor (ARS 52) volunteer their time and efforts to help clean old trails at Lokoaka Pond on the Big Island.

**Ens. Chris Reece**  
*USS Salvor PAO*

What happens when you combine protected wetlands, gravel, an endangered waterfowl, and the biggest small ship in the Navy? According to the crewmembers on USS Salvor (ARS 52), it adds up to good community relations and a whole lot of fun. That's because crewmembers from the Pearl Harbor-based salvage ship volunteered their time on a recent trip to the Big Island to work at Lokoaka Pond in Hilo.

The area, located two miles south of the airport, is home to hundreds of different species of plants and animals. The ponds contain everything from carp and mullet to tilapia and aholehole. The stands of kukui, guava and eucalyptus serve to house and protect herons and auku'u. The area is also a nesting site for the alae-keokeo, or Hawaiian Coot. In 1940, conservationists recorded over 1,000 of the birds nesting in the Lokoaka Pond area. Since then, their numbers have dwindled to less than 2,000 throughout the entire state.

Over the course of three days, the ship's crew provided more than 250 hours of labor clearing trees, spreading gravel, and restoring trails.

"Sure, when you think of it as spending three or four hours of your day hauling rocks around it doesn't sound like much fun, but when you're there you really get into it," said Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Bill Howes. "There was the way the ice springs met the ocean. I'm from Florida, so I'm used to brackish water being muddy, but this was crystal clear. You could actually see the layers of water when they met," said Howes.

But the trip was not all work. The Salvor crew also found plenty of time for hiking, volcano trips, flea markets and, of course, the Merrie Monarch Festival, the largest hula competition in the world.

In the end, the wetlands received some much needed repair, the local residents were given a fresh look on an old pond, and the Hawaiian Coot has a place to call home.

What did the crewmembers from the Salvor get? According to Howes, "a trip I'm going to be talking about for a long time to come."

# Navy Surgeon General addresses Congress, stresses medical support of war effort

**Jan Davis**  
*Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs*

Producing hyper-fit, hyper-healthy Sailors and Marines, protecting them from hazards when they go in harm's way, restoring the sick and injured while caring for their families, and helping a grateful nation thank its retired warriors are the goals of Navy Medicine, according to testimony from Navy Surgeon General Vice Adm. Michael L. Cowan, Medical Corps, during an appearance on Capitol Hill.

Cowan spoke before the House Armed Services Committee's military personnel subcommittee, addressing the state of Navy Medicine and telling them that great things are going on. It was the first time he had officially talked to members of Congress since he took office late last summer.

"The events of Sept. 11 have only served to strengthen my conviction that this is the correct course for Navy medicine," said Cowan. "Our success and readiness are epitomized by the responsiveness of the hospital ship (USNS) Comfort (T-AH 20) and Sailors of Fleet Hospital

20 at Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba."

Cowan told the committee that he recently visited the fleet hospital in Cuba. He was impressed, "but not surprised," by the professionalism and morale of the hospital's staff. Cowan also addressed the challenge of providing quality health care to beneficiaries.

"We must not forget the crucial role of our health care providers," he said. "Retention continues to be a concern for both the enlisted and officer medical specialties."

Cowan called on Congress for assistance in closing the pay gap in these medical specialty areas to improve and sustain retention of these professionals.

Cowan closed his oral remarks by thanking Congress for the support and additional funding the entire military health care system received, enabling them to respond to unexpected and ongoing challenges.

"The war on terrorism we are fighting will be an asymmetric war, and we will fight it asymmetrically — politically, socially and militarily," said Cowan. "And in the end, the military contribution will be paramount to success."

# O'Kane Sailors, families cruise to Maui

**JO3 Christina Glover**  
*USS O'Kane Public Affairs Office*

USS O'Kane (DDG 77) opened its doors in March, as Sailors invited family and friends aboard for a dependent's cruise to Maui. This four-day outing gave the crew an opportunity to show their families the ship in action and a taste of what life is like underway.

One hundred and twenty-two guests checked onboard as the sun rose over Pearl Harbor. Sailors gave each guest a welcome aboard package containing a pamphlet with the ship's "rules of the road" (safety guidelines), earplugs, and seasickness pills (just in case). For the kids, Sailors prepared special folders containing games and journal pages on which to record their memories of the trip.

As soon as the ship cleared the harbor, it immediately began to demonstrate its full maneuvering capabilities to its guests. The crew performed a series of "Crash backs," which consisted of speeding up to full power and then crashing back to all engines back full.

They also demonstrated some of the O'Kane's self-defense capabilities by firing Mounts 21 and 22 CIWS (Close in Weapon System) and the 40mm and 25mm guns.

Then following a steel beach picnic, Sailors led their children in a fun and educational scavenger hunt. The kids canvassed the ship trying to discover how many animals are on the foc'sle and how to spell their names in signal flags. The winners, Elizabeth and Frances Skardon, re-



U.S. Navy photo  
USS O'Kane (DDG 77)

ceived an American flag flown over the ship during the cruise.

The biggest hit of the afternoon was the humpback whales. The ship encountered several pods, some approaching as close as 200 yards. The number and proximity of the whales meant slower speeds for the ship but gave both guests and crew an amazing first hand view of the spouting and breaching of the humpbacks.

By afternoon, the O'Kane anchored off the coast of historic Lahaina Town. Located on the Western Coast of Maui, Lahaina was the site of the first European settlement in the islands and was the Hawaiian capital from 1810 to 1845.

For O'Kane Sailors and family, Lahaina became the starting point for exploration of Maui, the valley isle. Maui's diverse climates, high mountains, and beautiful beaches provided the perfect location for a Hawaiian family get-away. A number of families made the trek to the highest point on the island, Haleakala. "My most memorable moment,"

said Sonar Technician 2nd Class (SW) Samuel A. Turks, "was standing at the top of the crater and watching the clouds."

Electronic Technician 2nd Class Robert C. Tyus drove the Hana Highway. Coming around a curve he saw a white cross on top of a hill with numerous trees and tropical plant life. Located behind the cross was a white waterfall.

"It was the most amazing site that I'd seen all day," he said.

Other Sailors and their families went to "Ulalena" at Maui Myth and Magic Theatre.

"It was a really beautiful show," said Damage Controlman 1st Class Noel P. Gaon. The story began with the mythic creation of the islands and rolled through successive waves of voyagers who have found their way to the shores, from the first Polynesians to Captain Cook, and finally to the current settlers.

The following Monday, after a full weekend, the guests returned to the O'Kane for the trip home. Choppy seas and high winds made it a rough ride, but the families made the best of it, venturing topside for an unique view of the Waikiki skyline.

By mid afternoon the O'Kane moored at Bravo 13 pier back in Pearl Harbor, and happy families headed home after a weekend of whale watching, sunbathing, shopping and waterfalls.

"Having my family onboard was beautiful," said Turks. "I think it was great that they had the chance to see what it's like to be on a ship and see what I do."